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AN EARLY ACCOUNT OF THE CHOCTAW INDIANS

BY

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THE NEW ERA PRINTING COMPANY  
LANCASTER, PA.



## AN EARLY ACCOUNT OF THE CHOCTAW INDIANS<sup>1</sup>

By JOHN R. SWANTON

CONSIDERING the important part played by the Choctaw Indians in early Louisiana history it is surprising what slight attention they received from early French writers. In the classic works of Le Page du Pratz, Dumont de Montigny, and others, we have pretentious descriptions of the Natchez, and considerable accounts of many of the other leading tribes on and near the Mississippi. Bossu, writing somewhat later, furnishes a considerable description of the Alabama Indians about Ft. Toulouse. But up to the present time we know of no French writer who made the huge Choctaw nation a special object of attention. This was probably due partly to the fact that there was nothing peculiar or striking either in the social organization or the customs of these people, as was the case for instance with the Natchez, and partly to the common knowledge regarding them which soon came to be shared by the greater part of the French settlers of Louisiana. And as, in course of time, a great deal of Choctaw ethnology quietly passed out of sight, it passed at the same time out of record as something too well known to need attention or to require the services of an historian. Fortunately, however, there was at least one exception to this general neglect, and this exception furnishes the occasion for the present article.

In September, 1916, the writer visited Chicago for the purpose of examining the valuable collection of works and documents in the Edward E. Ayer collection in the Newberry Library, and among the important manuscripts gone over at that time, some of which have been noted elsewhere, was a French narrative of Louisiana such as appeared frequently during the earlier part of the eighteenth century. This is entitled "Relation de La Louisianne" and is a small bound manuscript written in a fine, clear hand. There is nothing

<sup>1</sup> Printed by permission of the Smithsonian Institution.

to show whether it is the original or only a copy, and there is no clew to its author except that on the back are printed the words "Relat de Kened." The first and last words appear to be cut off, the last being probably the name of the author. The "Relation" has 267 pages and is of value to the historian of Louisiana hardly less than to the ethnologist. That part dealing with the Choctaw occupies all of chapters VII and VIII, pages 118 to 165. Of course the information embodied in this narrative is by no means to be compared with one of our modern ethnological studies, but it contains many important and interesting facts which could not be recorded at the present day. The footnotes are all mine. I have not attempted to smooth out the grammar of the original except in the more important particulars.

The Chaquetas are a hundred leagues north of Mobile. There are about four thousand bearing arms. The French divide them into three cantons. The eastern is named Ougoula annalé.<sup>1</sup> The chief of this canton has the same prerogatives as the grand chief. That of the west is called Ougoula tanama.<sup>2</sup> That of the south is named Taboka.<sup>3</sup> It is there where the grand chief lives.

This nation is governed by a grand chief whose power is absolute only so far as he knows how to make use of his authority, but as disobedience is not punished among them, and they do not usually do what is recommended to them, except when they want to, it may be said that it is an ill-disciplined government. In each village, besides the chief and the war chief, there are two Tascamingoutchy<sup>4</sup> who are like lieutenants of the war chief, and a Tichou-mingo<sup>5</sup> who is like a major. It is he who arranges for all of the ceremonies, the feasts, and the dances. He acts as speaker for the chief, and makes the warriors and strangers smoke. These Tichou-mingo usually become village chiefs. They [the people] are divided into four orders, as follows. [The first are] the grand chiefs, village chiefs, and war chief; the second are the Atacoulitoupa or beloved

<sup>1</sup> Okla hanali or Six towns.

<sup>2</sup> Ougoula is Okla; tanama perhaps from tanampi, to fight.

<sup>3</sup> Perhpas from tabóko, noon, and hence the south.

<sup>4</sup> Taška minkochi, "made a war chief."

<sup>5</sup> Tishu minko, servant chief.

men<sup>1</sup> (hommes de valleur); the third is composed of those whom they call simply tasca or warriors; the fourth and last is atac emitlla.<sup>2</sup> They are those who have not struck blows or who have killed only a woman or a child.

This nation is warlike against similar people, and in the woods. The French always having needed to depend upon them in war, it has made them so insolent that they despise the French and would receive the English among them. They are much accustomed to receiving presents from the French, which formerly were very few, not reaching, then, a value of eight thousand *livres*, but which, increasing every year, amount at present to more than fifty thousand francs. They think that it is a right, that the French pay them for the lands which they occupy. It is this which they try to make them understand in the speeches which they make to the commandants of the posts where they go, saying:

Formerly our ancestors occupied the place where you<sup>3</sup> now live and came there to hunt; they have ceded it to you as to people who wished to be their friends, in consideration for which you have promised them a certain quantity of goods, and length of time has not cancelled the continuance of the gift, and of the friendship, which, having reigned between our ancestors and the French, reigns still between you and us. You know that every time you have asked us to take vengeance on your enemies who have insulted you, we have had pity, since, being few in numbers, you were unable to go to war, and that we, regarding you as our brothers, have left our wives, children, houses, villages, harvests, and periods of hunting to attack your enemies and stain our arms with their blood; that we have often lost our people there. You know that many times on returning from war we have taken credit for the goods that you have promised us, gained at the price of our blood, because they had not yet arrived by vessel from France. You know that the English are always at our doors importuning us to make an alliance with them, and sell them our deerskins at fairer prices than you offer. We have hopes then that in consideration of all these things you will look with pity on us and will share with us as your brothers in order that we may return to our village loaded with the presents you shall have given us.

Here are almost the exact words of one of their speeches, and the others do not differ much from it. They often repeat the same

<sup>1</sup> Hatak holitopa, "holy or beloved men."

<sup>2</sup> From hatak, "man" and perhaps imatali, "supporting."

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this speech the familiar form of the pronoun of the second person singular is employed.

thing, and in making a speech they usually consume two hours in talking.

When a band reaches Mobile in the time when presents are given out, which is usually the month of March or April, they stop three leagues<sup>1</sup> from the town, and send a messenger to inform the commandant of their arrival, and ask for bread and brandy. What they need is sent to them in proportion to their numbers, and the next day they arrive in ceremonial costume, which consists in a cloak without lining, a very dirty shirt, and a bad breechclout: the greater part have only one skin, of deer, bear, or bison, on the body. In this garb the interpreter conducts them to the commandant, where they begin by shaking his hand one after the other. You may believe that it tires him when the band is large. They smoke and then give [the pipe] to the commandant and the officers around him to smoke, as a sign of peace, after which they make the speech. Then they are sent back into the woods, their arms are mended, they are fed until they leave, and presents are made them. All of these irruptions (dessentes) of the savages cost the commandant infinitely for he has them very often at his table, or such [Indians] as come in while he is eating, to whom he is obliged to give food and drink by way of entertainment. The union having been placed on this footing for many years, scarcely are they gone when others come and this train (trin) usually continues three weeks, sometimes six. They are fed during this time with rice, corn, potatoes, a little bread, and sometimes brandy.

When a Frenchman wishes to go to trade among them, he usually chooses the time when they return with their presents. He asks of the chief of the band the number of savages he needs to carry his goods, for they go by land and every evening he must lie down under the open sky and on the earth. His entire bed consists in a bear skin and a small blanket. Meat is had on the route when the savages can kill anything; otherwise they live on corn (bled de turquie), which is called maize, which is boiled in water. When one has reached the village he is conducted to the house of the chief, where, having entered without uttering a word, he is seated on a cane bed

<sup>1</sup> Spelled *lieux*.

raised about three or four feet above the ground, for fear of the fleas. Then they throw you a pipe called calumet with the pouch full of tobacco which you smoke. It is to be noticed that all this is done without speaking, after which the chief says to you "You are come then?" Having answered that he has, one tells him the object of his journey and the kind of merchandise which he has brought to sell to his warriors. The next day he (the chief) informs all the people of the arrival of the Frenchman at his house, what he has brought, and what he asks for it. Each one comes to his shop, and takes away his goods, and when he (the trader) desires to return he informs the chief, who has the payments which he has agreed upon with his warriors brought to him. He again asks for porters and repairs to the French village. These journeys are usually of two or three months' duration, and two hundred per cent. is made by them; but it is necessary to know their language well.

Their house is nothing else than a cabin made of pieces of wood of the size of the leg, buried in the earth, and fastened together with *lianás*, which are very flexible bands. These cabins are surrounded with mud walls without window; the door is only from three to four feet in height. They are covered with bark of the cypress or the pine. A hole is left at the top of each gable-end to let the smoke out, for they make their fires in the middle of the cabins, which are a gunshot distance from each other. The inside is surrounded with cane beds raised from three to four feet from the ground on account of the fleas which exist there in quantities, because of the dirt. When they are lying down the savages never get up to make water but let it run through the canes of their bed. When lying down they have a skin of a deer or bear under them and a skin of a bison or a blanket above. These beds serve them as table and chair. They have by way of furniture only an earthen pot in which to cook their food, some earthen pans for the same purpose, and some fanners or sieves and hampers to prepare their corn, which is their usual nourishment. They pound it in a wooden crusher (pile) or mortar, which they make out of the trunk of a tree, hollowed by means of burning embers. The pestle belonging to it is sometimes ten feet long and as small around as the arm. The upper end is an un-

shaped mass which serves to weigh it down and to give force to this pestle in falling back, in order to crush the corn more easily. After it is thus crushed they sift it in order to separate the finer part. They boil the coarser in a great skin which holds about three or four *sceau* of water, and mix it sometimes with pumpkins, or beans, or bean leaves. When this stew is almost cooked they throw into it the finest of the corn which they had reserved to thicken the water, and by way of seasoning they have a pot hung in the air in which are ashes of corn silk, beanpods, or finally oak ashes, on which having thrown water they take the lye which has fallen into a vessel provided underneath, and with it season their stew which is called *sagamité*. This serves as their principal food, and as well that of the French who are in the colony who have not the means of living otherwise.

They sometimes make bread without lye, but rarely, because that consumes too much corn, and it is difficult to make, since they reduce it to flour only with the strength of their arms; after which it is kneaded or they boil it in water, or wrap it in leaves and cook it in the ashes, or finally having flattened the paste to the thickness of two crowns (ecus), and the diameter of the two hands, they cook it on a piece of a pot on the embers. They also eat it with acorns. After having reduced the acorns to flour they put them in a canesieve placed near the bank of a stream, and from time to time throw water upon them. By means of this lye they cause it to lose its bitterness, after which they put the paste around a piece of wood which they cook in the fire. When they have meat they boil it in water, however dirty it is, without washing it, saying that that would make it lose its flavor. When it is cooked they sometimes put some of the acorn flour into the broth. They also cook unpounded corn with their meat, and when it is dry they pound it and reduce it to lint (charpie). They mix it in boiling with this corn. That has no taste and one must be a savage to eat it.

While the corn is green is the time when they hold the most feasts and they prepare it in different ways. First they roast it in the fire and eat it so; many French eat it thus. When it is very tender they pound it and make porridge of it, but the most esteemed

among them is the cold meal. It is corn, considerably mature, which they boil, then roast to dry it, and then they pound it; and this flour has the same effect in cold water as wheat flour put into hot water over the fire and has a taste sufficiently agreeable; the French eat it with milk. They also have a species of corn which is smaller than the other and which comes to maturity in three months. That they dry and then without pounding it boil it with meat. This little corn, boiled with a turkey or some pieces of fat meat, is a favorite dish with them.

They are very dirty in their houses, in their drink and food, as upon themselves. One seldom sees among them a crooked or humpbacked person. They have very good figures. Their women are very ugly; they are like slaves to their husbands. They do everything in the house, work the ground, sow, and harvest the crop. The men sometimes aid them at a distance from the town, but never go for water or fire as soon as they are made warriors, considering that that would dishonor them. They occupy themselves only with hunting. They are very lazy and cunning. They cherish a desire for revenge for a generation. The grandson will avenge an insult made to his great-grandfather by killing one of the descendants of the one who gave the blow. They bring up their children in this spirit of revenge. With all that they never become angry, love much, and will sacrifice themselves for their friends, are very patient in suffering, and endure the death penalty without complaint. On the contrary they sing up to the last groan.

When a woman finds herself inconvenienced in the accustomed manner she immediately leaves the house, and goes a certain distance from it to a retired place. She lights a fire there with flint and steel (briquet). They say that they must use new fire, and if they took some of that of the house, the house would be polluted, and the woman would die from the strength of the sickness which would be increased. The men do not live with their wives while they are in this condition. They [the women] hide themselves from the sight of the men: the husbands then get their own food or go to the homes of their neighbors.

One day I found myself at the house of a savage who had gone hunting for me the evening before. On awakening next morning, not finding the woman of the house, and seeing a fire at a distance I went to find her. I was then ignorant of this ceremony and having begged her to make me some porridge of little grain, it was only by means of entreaties that I obtained my request. As I was beginning to eat her husband arrived. I asked him if he wanted some, and having answered me that he did, he began to eat with me, but when the plate was half emptied, it occurred to him to ask me who had prepared it; it is to be remarked that he had recognized the cause of his wife's absence through some articles which were missing from the house; when I replied that it was his wife who had been my cook, he was at once seized with sickness and went to the door to vomit. Then, re-entering and looking into the dish, he noticed some red things in the porridge, which were nothing else than the skin of the corn, some grains of which are red. He said to me: "How have you the courage to eat of this stew? Do you not see the blood in it?" Then he began vomiting again and continued until he had vomited up all that he had eaten; and his imagination was so strongly affected that he was sick on account of it for some days afterward. It is a thing which they take such great care to observe as to absent themselves during that time, and to bathe well before re-entering the house.

When a youth wishes to marry, he goes to find the father and the mother of the girl whom he desires. After having made his request he throws before the mother some strings of glass beads, and a breechclout before the father. If they take the presents it is a sign of their consent, and then the youth leads the girl away to his home without other ceremony. From this moment the mother can no longer appear before her son-in-law; if they are obliged to remain in the same room they make a little partition between them for fear lest they see each other. When a man's wife is pregnant and near the time of delivery, so long as she is in travail he eats only in the evening after sunset, and if the child is a girl he observes this fast eight days longer. They are very jealous. When they find their wives *flagrante delicto*, they complain to her parents re-

garding what they had given for her.<sup>1</sup> They cut off her hair and repudiate her. Sometimes the village takes cognizance of the case, seizes the woman and her lover, and gives them a hundred blows with sticks. Often they will cut off their nose and ears. This last is not done any more on account of the deformity which it causes, besides the fact that they often die from the effects. Formerly when they caught a woman in a fault they tied her to four stakes, and abandoned her to three or four hundred young people, of whom she died. When a woman is abandoned by her husband she is proclaimed to be what she is and then he who wishes can take her, at least unless someone adopts her as his wife, which is unusual, unless it be a man of another nation who takes her and carries her off with him. Otherwise she is obliged to go along the streams in the dusk of the evening singing songs belonging to this usage and in a peculiar tone of voice, hearing which if any young person has use for her he goes to find her, leading her away under the shelter of his blanket in order to let it be seen that she is under his protection. He keeps her as long as he wishes and feeds her; but when he is tired of her, she is obliged to begin her wanderings again in order to live. Even though she wished to change her life her parents do not take her back, not daring to trust her promises. It is necessary that it should be a single man who takes her home to make her his wife in order that she be protected from insult. They may abandon their wives whenever they wish, and take many of them at a time. I saw one who had three sisters. When they marry a second time they take the sister of the dead wife, if she had one, otherwise a woman of the family.

They never whip their children. They live in a friendly way. If one comes to see them they immediately offer him food, so that if a man enters thirty houses in a day he eats thirty meals. They are very temperate.

They<sup>2</sup> have no religion. They recognize only the devil, and those among them who invoke him are called jugglers. These are usually doctors. These persons have much to fear when they undertake

<sup>1</sup> The manuscript has "une p . . ." here as if something had been omitted.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter VIII begins here.

the case of a sick person who is a chief, for if he dies after they have conjured, his relatives say that he has bewitched him, and if he escapes after he has been condemned to death, they say that he had bewitched him and that fate has erred; so in all ways he runs risk of being killed. When there is a sick person among them they have the doctor come to the place where he is, who, after having conjured or demanded of their spirit if the sick person will get well, bleeds him with a piece of flint. Eight or ten incisions are made in the skin in a space of the size of a crown (*ecu*), as when one cups, over which they place one end of a pierced horn and suck it until the horn is full of blood. As these jugglers sometimes wish to hide their ignorance they say that someone has thrown a spell over them [the patients] and then they adroitly put some bison wool or a little piece of wood into the bottom of the horn, and after having sucked the sick man and poured out the blood which is in the horn, they show this wood or bison wool to the parents of the sick man, which they make them believe is a charm; then this juggler passes as a very wise man.

It is certain that these jugglers speak to the devil. I have seen a number of examples of it. I will cite three to you. One day, arriving May third at the house of a man named Fine Teeth, chief of the Naniabas,<sup>1</sup> returning from the Chicachas and being in need of tobacco, I asked some of this chief, who hunted in his chest where he had placed three twists in order to give me some, but could not find them. He thought it was I or some one of the French whom I had with me who had hidden it from him, but when he had learned that it was not, I saw him dress and daub himself as if he were going to a dance, after which, having gone to an open space a gunshot distant from the house, we saw him fill his pipe, strike the flint, light it, and smoke it with many gesticulations, as if he were disputing with someone. When he had smoked it half up it seemed to us that he gave it to someone else to smoke, without, however, our seeing anyone, except that he held his pipe at a distance from himself, and the smoke which came out in puffs (*peletons*) as if

<sup>1</sup> A small tribe connected with the Choctaw, but living apart from them at the junction of the Alabama and Tombigbee rivers.

someone smoked it. He returned to us immediately and told us, all of a sweat, that he knew who had taken it, and continuing on toward a cabin opposite his own, whither I followed him, he sprang at the throat of a savage, demanding of him the three twists of tobacco which he had taken from him at such an hour in such a manner, in short explaining to him the method which he had employed in accomplishing his theft. The poor savage, all of a tremble, admitted his crime and returned to him his tobacco.

The French, curious regarding his skill, went to find him, and begged him, meditating recompense, to make the otter dance for them. He took his tobacco-pouch which was an otter skin in which he kept his pipe and his tobacco, which he threw into the middle of an open place where the people were assembled to judge of his skill: after he had uttered a number of badly articulated words and thrown himself repeatedly into the fire, from which he came out in a perspiration, and without being burned, this skin was seen to swell out, fill with flesh, and come to life, and to run between the legs of the Frenchmen, some of whom in the company having caressed it and felt of it, found that it was like a true otter. When each one was satisfied it returned to the same place where it had come to life and was seen to diminish in size and return to the form which it had before.

When we were surrounded by the Spaniards in Dauphin island, and were expecting help from France from day to day, we wished to know whether it was on the point of arriving, which could only be known by means of the savages whom we had with us. They were then made to conjure, and having done this they reported that five vessels would come the next day, three of which were large and two smaller, that they were loaded with soldiers, that one of the little ones would not arrive as soon as the others, because it was separated and was still a long way off, but that all would have arrived the next day toward evening. This actually took place, for the next day at eight in the morning the first vessel was discovered, and about three or four in the afternoon four anchored at Dauphin island, but the fifth did not come in until the next day.

They take medicine often from their chief. They take medicines

made of herbs and roots of trees boiled together, which they drink, and to make themselves vomit they run feathers down their throats. Sometimes they make themselves sweat. For this purpose they make a little cabin about four feet in height and eight in diameter, which they cover with bison skin and blankets. They put inside five or six red-hot balls, on which from time to time they throw a little water to stimulate the heat. They enclose in this little space as many as seven persons, and after they have sweat for about a half or three-quarters of an hour they get out of this hole quickly and go with precipitation to throw themselves into the freshest water. I am sure that this remedy has never been commanded by any descendant of *Æsculapius*. Also it is true that the majority of these people suffer from debility (*en langueur*) with pains over the entire body.

When a sick person is near death the doctor leaves him and informs his relatives of it, assuring them that he cannot escape. Then the women come to wash his body, paint him, daub his face, dress him in all of the finest clothes which he had, and lie on the ground in the open space in front of his door. His wife lies on his stomach weeping, with his nearest relatives who also lie upon him and stifle him. They ask him why it is that he hungers to die, if he has lacked anything, if his wife did not love him enough, if he was not well respected in his village; in fact this unfortunate patient is obliged to die in spite of himself. Those who have lain down on him cry at the top of their lungs, imagining that he does not hear, since he does not reply. Besides that there are the hired criers who during this time come to weep or rather howl to music beside the body, before and after his death. As soon as he is dead his relatives erect a kind of cabin in the shape of a coffin, directly opposite his door six feet from the ground on six stakes, surrounded by a mud wall, and covered with bark in which they enclose this body all dressed, and which they cover with a blanket. They place food and drink beside him, giving him a change of shoes, his gun, powder, and balls. They say that it is because he is going into another country, and it is right that he have everything he needs in his journey. They believe that the warriors go to make

war in the other world, and that everyone there performs the same acts that he did in this. The body rests in this five or six months, until they think that it is rotted, which makes a terrible stench (infection) in the house. After some time all the relatives assemble ceremoniously and the *femme de valeur* of the village who has for her function (distriqué) to strip off the flesh from the bones of the dead, comes to take off the flesh from this body, cleans the bones well, and places them in a very clean cane hamper, which they enclose in linen or cloth. They throw the flesh into a field, and this same flesh stripper, without washing her hands, comes to serve food to the assembly. This woman is very much honored in the village. After the repast they go singing and howling to carry the bones into the charnel-house of the canton which is a cabin with only one covering in which these hampers are placed in a row on poles. The same ceremony is performed over chiefs except that instead of putting the bones in hampers they are placed in chests locked with a key in the charnel-house of the chiefs.

When any of their enemies has declared war on them, they take counsel together over the affront which they have received, and after having resolved to make war on the nation by which they have been insulted, they begin the war dance. This commonly lasts eight days, and serves to encourage each one of the warriors who scarcely eat at all during this time, and who make libations of the juice of herbs which the medicine-man gives them, and with which they rub themselves, which has the virtue they say of giving them strength and courage, an invaluable herb if it were known in Europe. After this they set out to war. On the way, when they have to light a fire in order to cook food, they usually light it in a little valley for fear of being discovered by some party, for in that case the party will follow them until it has found a good opportunity to rush upon them. They never attack their enemies when they are awake; but in the evening, when they have discovered the place where they intend to pass the night, they try to get as close to them as they can, and, as the ground in the woods is covered with dry leaves which make a noise in walking, they have patience enough to remove them, one by one, with their toes, of which they make use

as of the hand, and if unfortunately they break some small branches, they immediately mimic the cry of certain birds which they imitate very well, in order to have it thought that it is this bird which has made the noise; if they perceive their enemy asleep, especially just at daybreak, they utter the death cry, and on the instant all shoot at once, each on his man, and they spring upon them war club in hand in order to finish those who are only wounded, from whom they carry away the scalps. If they have time they strip them and return to their village, within sight of which they utter the cry of warriors who have struck a blow, and who bring scalps. Each one [in the village] comes before them ceremoniously and they are led into the square in the same manner. They engage in dances as a sign of rejoicing over their victory and if any of the party has a child or nephew who has not yet taken part in such a triumph, he shares half of the scalp he has taken with him and has him received as a warrior. The ceremony is that the one who undergoes it suffers two hundred blows of a neck-band, which is a piece of hide five or six fathoms long, of the breadth of a finger, doubled many times, with which the warriors strike him full arm blows in turn on his back and on his belly, in order to make him understand that a warrior must endure everything patiently, even when he is taken by the enemy, and sing while they make him suffer and die. He must suffer these blows while singing, for if he should weep he would never be received and would pass as a woman, and unworthy of being admitted into the body of warriors. When they hold these ceremonial dances, each wears on his head a crown made of a piece of otter skin to which are fastened as many broken white feathers as they have killed men in their lives. Each family has its quarterings tattooed on the stomach and on the arms. They also put them on the handles of their war clubs, and when they wish to meet in the woods they make a mark on the trees, where they put their arms, by which the one who has made the mark is known, the trail he has taken, and where he has gone.

When they capture any young people, girls, women, or young boys alive, they carry them to their villages and make slaves of them. There are nations which adopt them as their dogs; then

they make them perform all the functions of a dog, guard the doors, growl when anyone enters or goes out, eat the leavings of the dishes, and gnaw the bones. When they are able to bring home prisoners, they have them burned at their villages, and it is a great joy to them when that happens.

When the French came among them they were willing to eat neither hens nor swine "because," said they, "these animals eat filth;" but they have accustomed themselves to it with the French, and eat all of their stews. When they wish to feast their friends they kill a dog, of which they have quantities, and serve it to them.

When they have no flint and steel (*batte feu*) in the woods and wish to light a fire, they make it easily by the contact of two pieces of wood which they rub rapidly against each other and make it catch on tinder which is near by. This tinder is made of fungi which grow on oaks.

When they have promised to conclude a peace five or six leading men of the nation come, bearing a calumet or pipe made of a stone, red like coral, which is found in rocks in the Illinois country.<sup>1</sup> This calumet has a stem about two or three feet in length surrounded by red feathers artistically worked, and from which hangs eight or ten black and white feathers. This serves them as a war standard, as a seal in alliances, as a mark of the continuation of faithfulness among friends, and as a sign of war with those with whom they wish to break. It is true that there is one which is the calumet of peace and another that of war. They are both made similarly. When they have concluded the peace the master of ceremonies lights this calumet and has all those who are in the assembly smoke two or three whiffs. Then the treaty is concluded and inviolable. They deliver this calumet to the chief with whom they make the contract which is as a hostage of their good faith, and the fidelity with which they wish to observe the articles on which they have agreed.

They do not make any curious work except their calumets, of which I have just spoken, and some articles of bison wool which the women spin, of which they make garters which they tint with different colors which never change. They also make a tissue,

<sup>1</sup> Probably catlinite.

partly of this wool, and partly of fibre from a very strong herb which they spin. This tissue is double like the two-sided handkerchiefs and thick as canvas, half an ell wide and three quarters long. That serves them as a skirt. They also make cane hampers of different colors, very pretty.

They are very lazy by nature, a much longer time lying down than standing, very great gamblers in a ball game which is like the long racket [game]. They place about twenty of one village against as many of another, and put up wagers against each other to very considerable amounts for them. They wager a new gun against an old one which is not worth anything, as readily as if it were good, and they give as a reason that if they are going to win they will win as well against a bad article as against a good one, and that they would rather bet against something than not bet at all. They also have a game with four pieces of cane. When they are very much excited they wager all that they have, and, when they have lost all, they wager their wives for a certain time, and after that wager themselves for a limited time.

They count by nights, and when they wish to play with another village, they send a deputy, who carries the word, and who delivers to the chief a number of little sticks. Every day one is thrown away, and the last which remains shows that the next day is the day chosen.<sup>1</sup>

They have dances among them accompanied by feasts, which are almost alike. Only the names differ; as the dance of the turkey, bison, bear, alligator. In this last they have masks made like the head of this animal, one or two disguising themselves thus, while five or six others take masks of different animals which the alligator commonly eats, and then they make a thousand grotesque antics. [Others are] the dance of the bustard, of the small corn, the war dance, and the dance of the young people, which is danced no longer, the French having made them conceive too great horror for it. When they have these dances, they begin about two hours after midday. They are painted; they put on their finest clothing, and

<sup>1</sup> According to the writer's experience the day chosen is that on which only one stick remains.

make a belt of about forty pot-metal bells as big as the fist. Others put on little bells (*cloclettes*), and if they have [big] bells (*cloches*), and are able to carry them, they take them to these dances, loving the noise extraordinarily. They have a rattle (*chichiquoüa*) in the hand, or a war club, or a pistol. They dance around a drummer who has in his hand only one drumstick, with which he strikes a deerskin which is stretched over an earthen pot or over a kettle. They accompany this sort of noise with a song of five or six words which they repeat continually. These dances last until day, or until they go to sleep. They have knowledge of very curious simples.

They believe that there are ghosts and tell many stories on this subject which are improbable. They say that these ghosts (or apparitions) are of people who are dead and have not been given certain effects on dying of which they had need in the other world—as those who are drowned or killed in war—and which they again come to seek.

Their country is very beautiful, not so well provided with woods as that on the shore of the ocean. There are very large plains cut up by little streams which water them: in these plains for the pasture of cattle is excellent grass which grows to the height of a man. There is only one river which passes near this nation, at a village named Youanny, and it can be ascended only when the water is half up, because when it is entirely up the current is too rapid and when it is way down there is not enough water to enable boats to pass. It discharges itself into the river of the Pascagoulas, which empties itself into the sea opposite the Isle Ronde eight leagues from Biloxi. It is by that that the goods are carried to the detachment which is at Youanny. It is only a few years ago since one [detachment] has been located there, and because the savages had asked to have Frenchmen among them; they wished also to have a warehouse among them, giving as their reason the difficulty of carrying their deerskins to Mobile, or to New Orleans, and the fact that the ease of finding goods at home gave them courage to devote themselves more willingly to the chase. There is also a reason which ought to be added to this. It is that the facility which they would have in finding goods in their villages, would prevent them from carrying

theirs to other nations, for receiving them from them, and would attach them so much the more to the French. But it would be necessary also that these stores never lack merchandise, which happens often on account of the delay of vessels. It has been desired to give the exclusive privilege of this trade to three or four persons, as is done in Canada, so that only a certain number go to trade with the savages, on account of the permission which they receive, but the colony of Louisiana is not sufficiently well established to do the same. There are a number of people not in a condition to follow any craft, not knowing any, and not in a position to work the soil, not having the strength or the means of having negroes, but who live by means of trade. On their return from the savages they scatter in the town their peltries or the commodities which they bring back in payment to those from whom they have borrowed that by means of which they have carried on their trade; this causes each one to feel (share in) this commerce. Instead of allowing this to belong exclusively to three or four persons who are enriched while the others die of hunger within a settlement, one ought rather to consider the general than the particular good.

The country of the Chiquachas (Chickasaw) is better provided with plains than that of the Chaquetas and the land is more beautiful, the soil much better. It is also colder. The more one ascends into the country, the more beautiful, genial (*gratieux*), fecund, and suitable for building towns one finds it. There are mountains of solid stone. There are all kinds of woods to use in building. But the river of Mobile does not extend as far as the [Chickasaw] village.

When the Chiquachas or Chaquetas wish to bring something of the product of their hunting to Mobile in winter they make a raft, place themselves and their goods upon it, and let it drift with the current which brings them to the villages of the savages near the French, where, having sold their goods, they return home by land on foot, although they have many horses, almost all English or Spanish.

As the English carry all of their goods there on horses, the [Indians] often steal them from them and keep them. So far as the Chaquetas are concerned the greater part of those which they have

come from the French. In the last war with the Natchés they had themselves given a mare for each slave, French and black, which they recaptured. It is this which provided them with horses, and soon they were able to sell to the French. They let them live in the woods, and when they have need of them they go to hunt for them. I have noticed that animals of this kind, accustomed to live in the woods, decline visibly when one wishes to keep them at home. It is true that they are not fed at all as in Europe and they are not curried either. They would become very dear if one wanted to meet the expense of having them the year round at his home, there not being sufficient forage to keep them a long time. They are very lively when coming out of the woods and those who ride them go at breakneck speed. The women and the girls ride naturally on horseback in all the islands like the men. As horses are not numerous they make use of cattle for the cart and for the plows.

NAMES OF THE CHAQUETA VILLAGES	NUMBER OF MEN	NAMES OF THE CHAQUETA VILLAGES	NUMBER OF MEN
Those of the east number six villages.			
Chicachae.....	150	Pinté.....	50
Osquæ alagna.....	400	Abissa.....	40
Tala.....	60	Boucfalaya.....	70
Nachoubaotienya.....	40	Stéchipouta.....	40
Bouctouloutchy.....	30	Filitamon.....	60
Youanny.....	30	Conchabouloucta.....	100
		Louscouchetacanlé.....	50
		Ectchanqué.....	30
Those of the south number four villages.		Ougoulabalbaa.....	100
Conchats.....	150	Oqué oüllöu.....	60
Yanabé.....	100	Mongoulacha.....	150
Oqué loüsa.....	80	Otouc falayá.....	100
Coït chitou.....	80	Boucfouca.....	80
This name means "a great league"; they say that formerly this village was a great league in circuit. It is there where the grand chief lives.		Castacha.....	80
Those of the west number 35 villages.		Yachou.....	40
Bouctoucoulou.....	60	Abeca.....	200
The one who is to succeed to the crown is always chief of this village, and the grand chief lives there also, very often.		Cafétalaya.....	70
		Outapacha.....	40
		Toüalé.....	40
		Achouqouma.....	30
		Bisacha.....	80
		Scanapa, village of the chief.....	30
		Ebitoupougoula.....	60
		Bouctoucölötü.....	90
		Abeca.....	60

NAMES OF CHAQUETA VILLAGES	NUMBER OF MEN	NAMES OF CHAQUETA VILLAGES	NUMBER OF MEN
Oulitacha.....	40	Epitoupougoula.....	80
Loucféatá.....	50	Ougoulatanap.....	150
Mongoulacha.....	60		
Yachouï or Achouq loüá.....	70	This village is near the Chiquachas	
Itéopchaqüo.....	100	on the trail from the Alibamons	
Osapaissa.....	50	and has a fort, because these two	
Ouatonaöilá.....	80	nations are very often at war to-	
		gether.	

There are, as you see, many of the same name. Besides these forty-five villages there are many little ones whose names I do not know, which have, however, their own chiefs like the big ones. But as these vllages are very remote and very small the French have scarcely any dealings with them, and have knowledge of them only when the savages speak of them themselves. They report that besides among them they have sometimes seen wandering savages pass; they name them so because those peóple do not make villages at all, and in consequence neither plant nor sow, and live only on meat; they follow the herds of bison, and these animals serve them as food. This makes them change their abode as many times as they change it themselves. At night they sleep in trees for fear of venomous serpents or beasts. These savages take on the appearance of other creatures whose lives resemble theirs.

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WASHINGTON, D. C.





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